MARVEL

036

STAR WARS

DOCTOR APHRA™

SPURRIER • SANTOS • BOLSON
WONG • O'HALLORAN

UNSPEAKABLE REBEL SUPERWEAPON

Part V

Rogue archaeologist Doctor Aphra is known across the galaxy as a brilliant scientist as well as a thief and obtainer of ancient valuable artifacts—which has earned her the ire of both the Rebellion and Empire.

After Imperial Minister Pitina Voor placed a bounty on her and her sidekick, Vulaada, Aphra offered the ancient Jedi weapon called the FARKILLER to the Empire in exchange for her protection, ruining the rebels' plans to use the rifle to assassinate the Emperor and end the war.

Now guests in Voor's headquarters, Aphra and Vulaada have been shocked to discover that Voor has been planning to overthrow the Emperor herself....

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"I WAS BORN *PITINA MAR-MAS VOOR*, 25 YEARS BEFORE THE RISE OF PALPATINE, TO A LIFE *DEVOID* OF PRIVILEGE.

"WELL, *COMPARATIVELY* DEVOID. I WAS BARELY EVEN A *MIDDLE-RANKING* PRINCESS.

"MY FAMILY *MARRIED ME OFF* TO A BLOVIATING *SENATOR* ON MY EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY.

"HE WAS USELESS AT ANYTHING EXCEPT SAYING 'YES,' SO THE EMPIRE'S RISE WAS QUITE THE *MAKING* OF HIM.

"HE GOT AN *ADVISOR'S* OFFICE FOR HIS LOYALTY, AND THERE HE WOULD'VE STAYED: ORDERING *GENOCIDES* BETWEEN NAPS.

"HE WAS JUST A MAN, AFTER ALL, AND HAD NO ROOM IN HIS MIND FOR ANYTHING BUT *CONQUEST*.

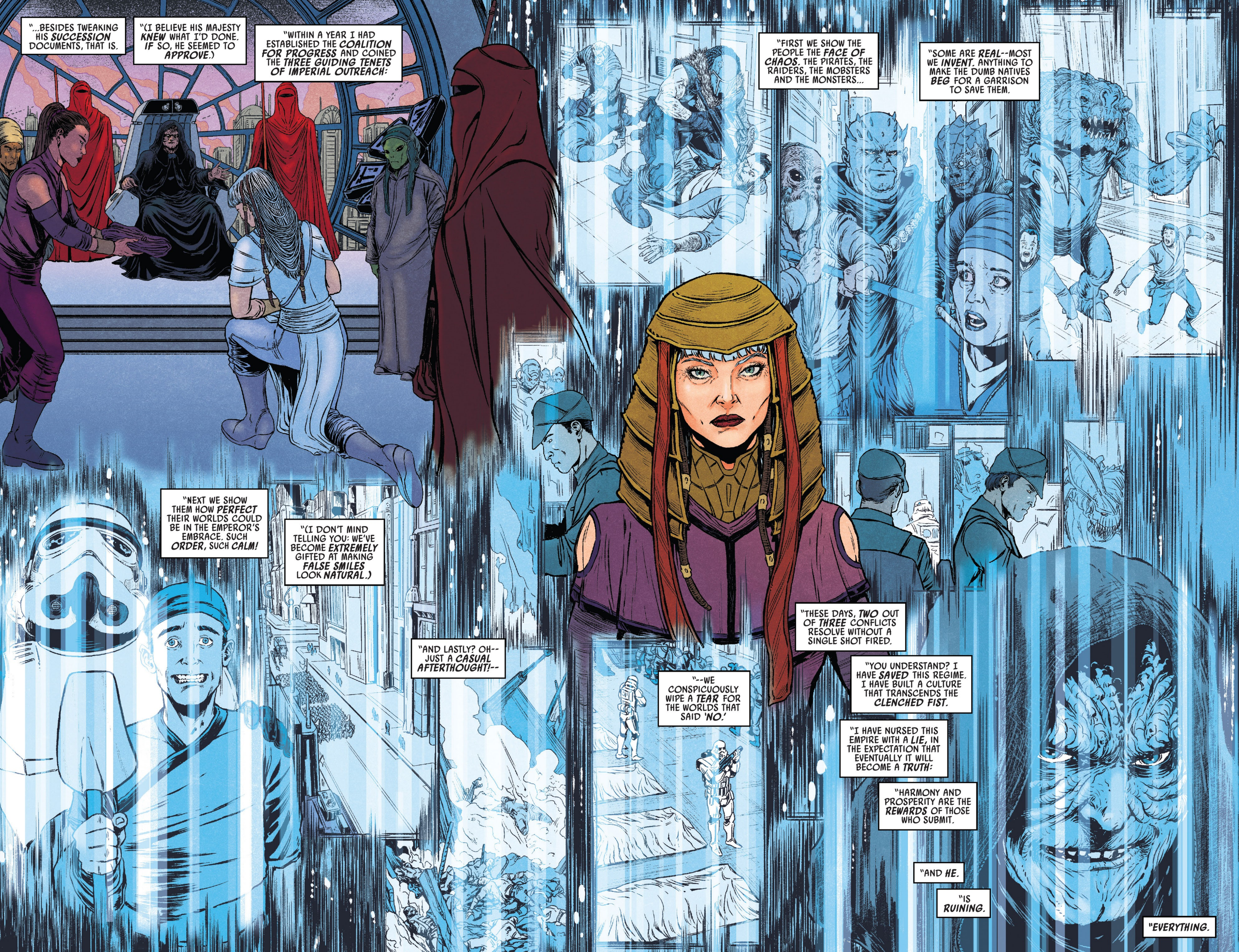
"BUT I COULD SEE IT. EVERY WORLD WE TOOK COST *THOUSANDS* OF TROOPERS AND *BILLIONS* OF CREDITS.

"THE EMPIRE WAS BEING MURDERED BY ITS OWN *EXPANSION*.

"WHAT ELSE COULD I DO? I SPREAD THE RUMOR THAT *LORD VADER* SUSPECTED MY HUSBAND OF *SEDITION* AND MADE SURE HE *HEARD* ABOUT IT.

"WE FOUND HIM *HANGING* BY HIS OWN CUMMERBUND THE NEXT MORNING.

"THAT WAS MY FIRST FORAY INTO THE ART OF *PERSUASION*. A PERFECT *TRIUMPH*, I FELT, AND I HADN'T EVEN LIFTED A FINGER.


"...BESIDES TWEAKING HIS SUCCESSION DOCUMENTS, THAT IS.
"(I BELIEVE HIS MAJESTY KNEW WHAT I'D DONE. IF SO, HE SEEMED TO APPROVE.)
"WITHIN A YEAR I HAD ESTABLISHED THE COALITION FOR PROGRESS AND COINED THE THREE GUIDING TENETS OF IMPERIAL OUTREACH:
"FIRST WE SHOW THE PEOPLE THE FACE OF CHAOS. THE PIRATES, THE RAIDERS, THE MOBSTERS AND THE MONSTERS...
"SOME ARE REAL--MOST WE INVENT. ANYTHING TO MAKE THE DUMB NATIVES BEG FOR A GARRISON TO SAVE THEM.
"NEXT WE SHOW THEM HOW PERFECT THEIR WORLDS COULD BE IN THE EMPEROR'S EMBRACE. SUCH ORDER, SUCH CALM!
"(I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU: WE'VE BECOME EXTREMELY GIFTED AT MAKING FALSE SMILES LOOK NATURAL.)
"AND LASTLY? OH--JUST A CASUAL AFTERTHOUGHT!--
"--WE CONSPICUOUSLY WIPE A TEAR FOR THE WORLDS THAT SAID 'NO.'
"THESE DAYS, TWO OUT OF THREE CONFLICTS RESOLVE WITHOUT A SINGLE SHOT FIRED.
"YOU UNDERSTAND? I HAVE SAVED THIS REGIME. I HAVE BUILT A CULTURE THAT TRANSCENDS THE CLENCHED FIST.
"I HAVE NURSED THIS EMPIRE WITH A LIE, IN THE EXPECTATION THAT EVENTUALLY IT WILL BECOME A TRUTH:
"HARMONY AND PROSPERITY ARE THE REWARDS OF THOSE WHO SUBMIT.
"AND HE.
"IS RUINING.
"EVERYTHING.

"POGROMS, GENOCIDES, PURGES, *SUPERWEAPONS*. THE ONLY *HARMONY* HE UNDERSTANDS IS *TERROR*.

"HE FEELS NO NEED TO PROMOTE THE MYTH OF *PROSPERITY* BECAUSE HE HAS NO INTEREST IN IT COMING *TRUE*.

"HE WON'T APPEAR IN *PUBLIC*. WON'T *SMILE* FOR THE CAMERA. IF HE TRIED KISSING A BABY I'D WORRY FOR ITS *LIFE*.

"YOU UNDERSTAND MY DILEMMA? NOBODY EVER VOLUNTEERED TO EMBRACE A SAVIOR WHOSE ONLY JOY IS WATCHING HIS PET CYBORG SNAP THROATS.

"NO...I'M AFRAID--WHEN YOU GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT--OUR BELOVED EMPEROR SIMPLY *ISN'T* ADEQUATELY... *HMM...* WHAT'S THE WORD...?"

S-SO...YOU'RE SAYING YOU'RE GONNA...*KILL*... THE...THE ACTUAL *EMP*... *EMP*...

OH, DON'T SOUND SO *TERRIFIED*, VULAADA. IF I INTENDED TO *SILENCE YOU* TO KEEP MY LITTLE SECRET YOU'D BE DEAD ALREADY.

THE FACT IS: THERE'S NO *POINT*.

IT'LL BE *DONE* WITHIN THE HOUR.

"AND--LET ME BE QUITE CLEAR ON THIS--IT *WILL* BE DONE. THIS ISN'T SOME DREARY POINT-AND-PRAY *HIT*. NOT SOME DOOMED *INSURGENCY*.

"DISSATISFACTION IS RIFE IN CERTAIN QUARTERS. MY ALLIES IN THE COURT HAVE MANEUVERED--*EXTENSIVELY*--TO ENABLE A COUP."

ALL OUT OF THE GOODNESS OF THEIR HEARTS, I BET?

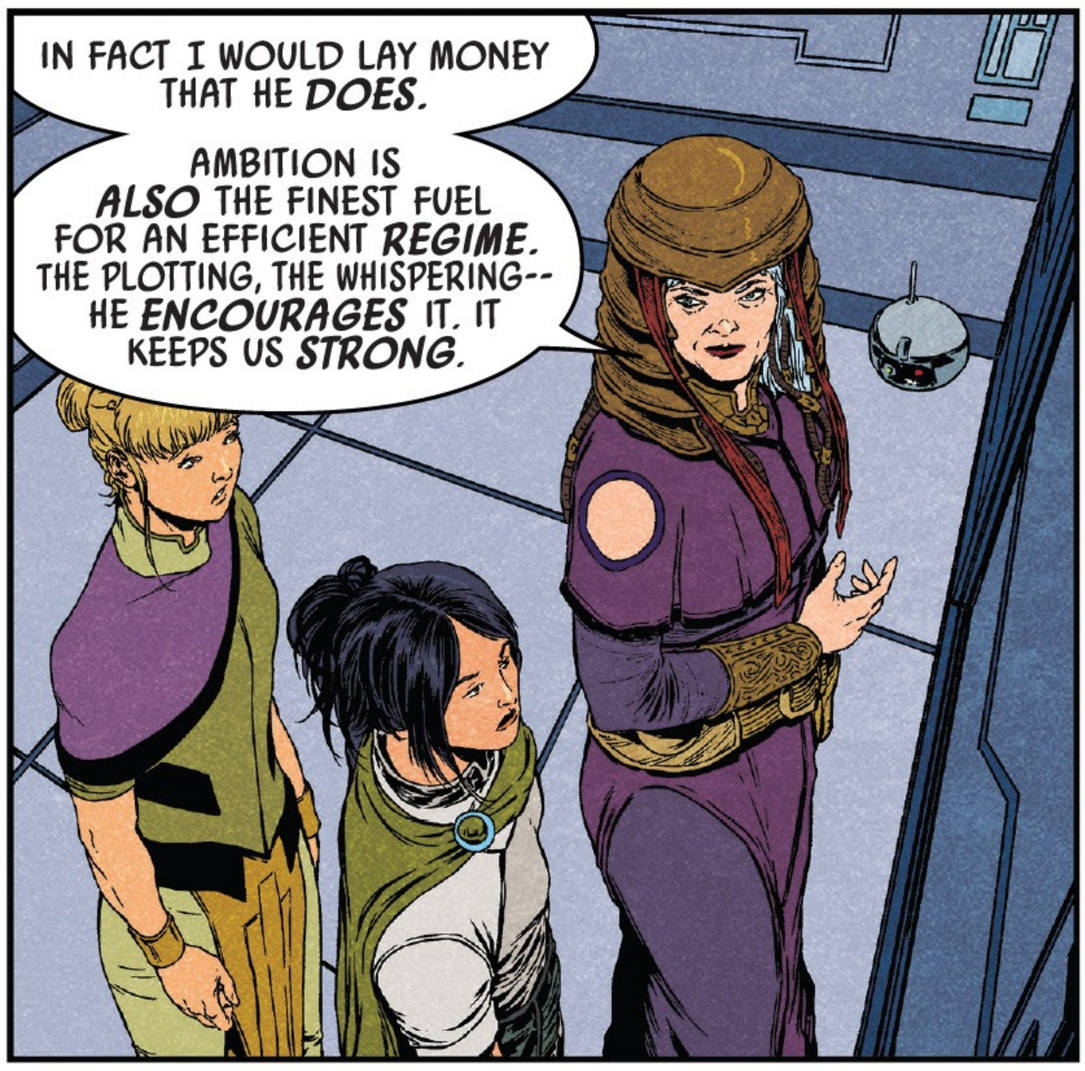
HA--NO, *INDEED*. AMBITION IS THE FINEST *FUEL* A CONSPIRACY CAN HAVE.

IT SIMPLY HAPPENS THAT WHEN I SEIZE ULTIMATE POWER, IT WILL BE BENEFICIAL TO *EVERYONE ELSE* TOO.

Y-YOU *CAN'T* KILL THE EMPEROR. HE'S...HE'S THE *EMPEROR*...

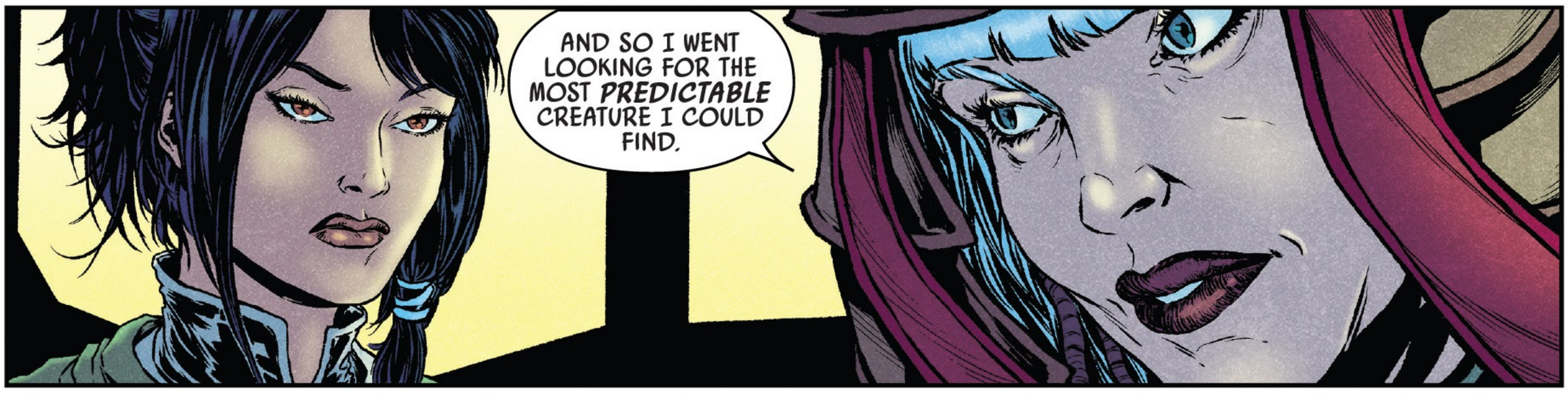
DEFINITELY A *TALL ORDER*, LADY. YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY...

"...HE CAN SENSE YOUR INTENTIONS BEFORE YOU ACT.
"YOU REALLY THINK HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR LITTLE CIRCLE OF SCHEME JUNKIES?"


IN FACT I WOULD LAY MONEY THAT HE DOES.
AMBITION IS ALSO THE FINEST FUEL FOR AN EFFICIENT REGIME. THE PLOTTING, THE WHISPERING--HE ENCOURAGES IT. IT KEEPS US STRONG.

BUT THE DETAILS? THE SPECIFIC MEANS OF HIS REMOVAL?
NO. WHY WOULD HE CONCERN HIMSELF WITH THAT WHEN HE CAN SENSE THE TRIGGER BEING PULLED BEFORE THE BLASTER IS EVEN ARMED?
IT'S THE ACT, YOU SEE? THE MOMENT THAT HATE AND RAGE BECOMES ACTION.

EMOTIONAL PREDICTABILITY. THAT'S THE SEAT OF HIS POWER--AND ONE REALLY OUGHT TO LEARN FROM ONE'S ENEMIES.
I REALIZED MY SOLUTION LAY IN A CHAIN OF CONSEQUENCES THAT I, TOO, COULD PREDICT.


AND SO I WENT LOOKING FOR THE MOST PREDICTABLE CREATURE I COULD FIND.

"ALL THAT TIME, WATCHING YOU ON MILVAYNE...
"ALL THE ACQUAINTANCES--WELL, ENEMIES, REALLY--I TRACKED DOWN AFTERWARD...THE STORY'S THE SAME EVERY TIME.
"YOU WILL ALWAYS SEEK YOUR OWN ENRICHMENT. YOU WILL ALWAYS THINK OF YOURSELF FIRST. YOU WILL ALWAYS BETRAY.
"AND YOU WILL ALWAYS FEEL GUILTY AFTERWARD.
I LEARNED THE WHEREABOUTS OF THAT RIFLE YEARS AGO. I COULDN'T JUST SEND YOU AFTER IT--YOU'D BE CAUTIOUS. PROBABLY LINE UP RIVAL BUYERS, TRY TO EXTORT ME...
SHE'S GOT YOU THERE.
SHUT UP.
"BUT--HOW EASY TO SIMPLY LET YOU FIND IT FOR YOURSELF?
"TO BE PREDICTABLY GREEDY.
"AND--SINCE THE REBELS ARE ALSO PREDICTABLE--HOW EASY TO LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU HAD IT."
BUT--WHY?
OH, COME. THINK IT THROUGH FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE, CHILD.
AND REMEMBER: THE REBELS KNOW YOUR MISTRESS AT LEAST AS WELL AS I DO.

"THEY KNOW SHE CAN'T BE *TRUSTED*. THEY KNOW SHE'LL DO *ANYTHING* TO SAVE HER OWN SKIN.

"THEY KNOW SHE SETS THINGS *UP* TO HER OWN ADVANTAGE WHEREVER SHE GOES.

"AND THEY KNOW SHE HAS ENTANGLEMENTS OF THE *HEART* TO KEEP HER COMING BACK.

"AND--THANKS TO *MY* LITTLE *LEAKS*--THEY KNEW SHE'D BE HUNTED *RELENTLESSLY* UNLESS SHE COULD SOMEHOW BUY A *PARDON* FROM THE EMPIRE.

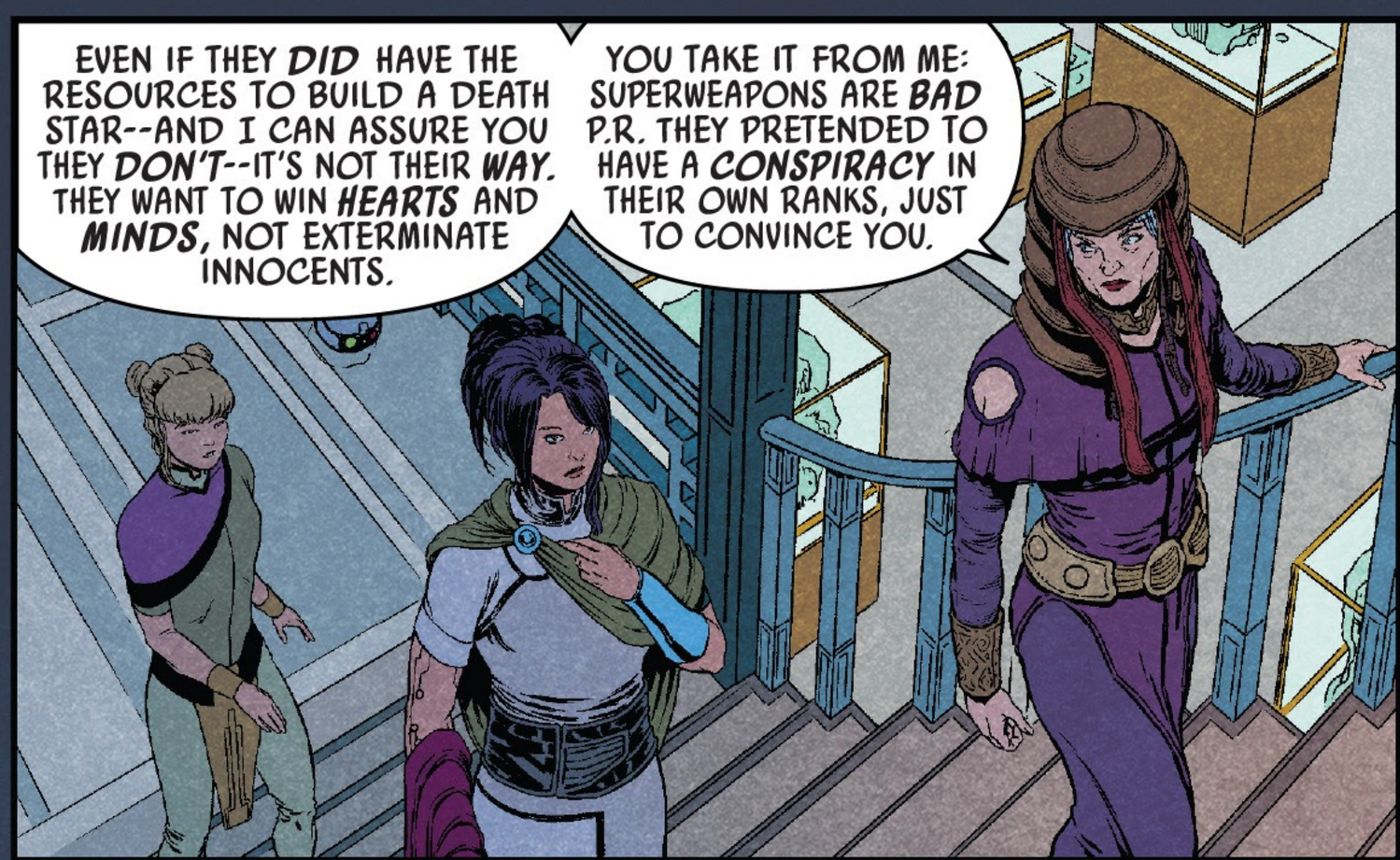
"SO, WHAT DO *THEY* PREDICT?"

YOU'RE... YOU'RE SAYING THEY...THEY T-TOOK THE *RIFLE* AWAY FROM US...

...EVEN THOUGH THEY *KNEW* WE'D STEAL IT BACK...?

THERE NEVER *WAS* A REBEL SUPERWEAPON, VU.

HM. CATCHING UP, ARE YOU?

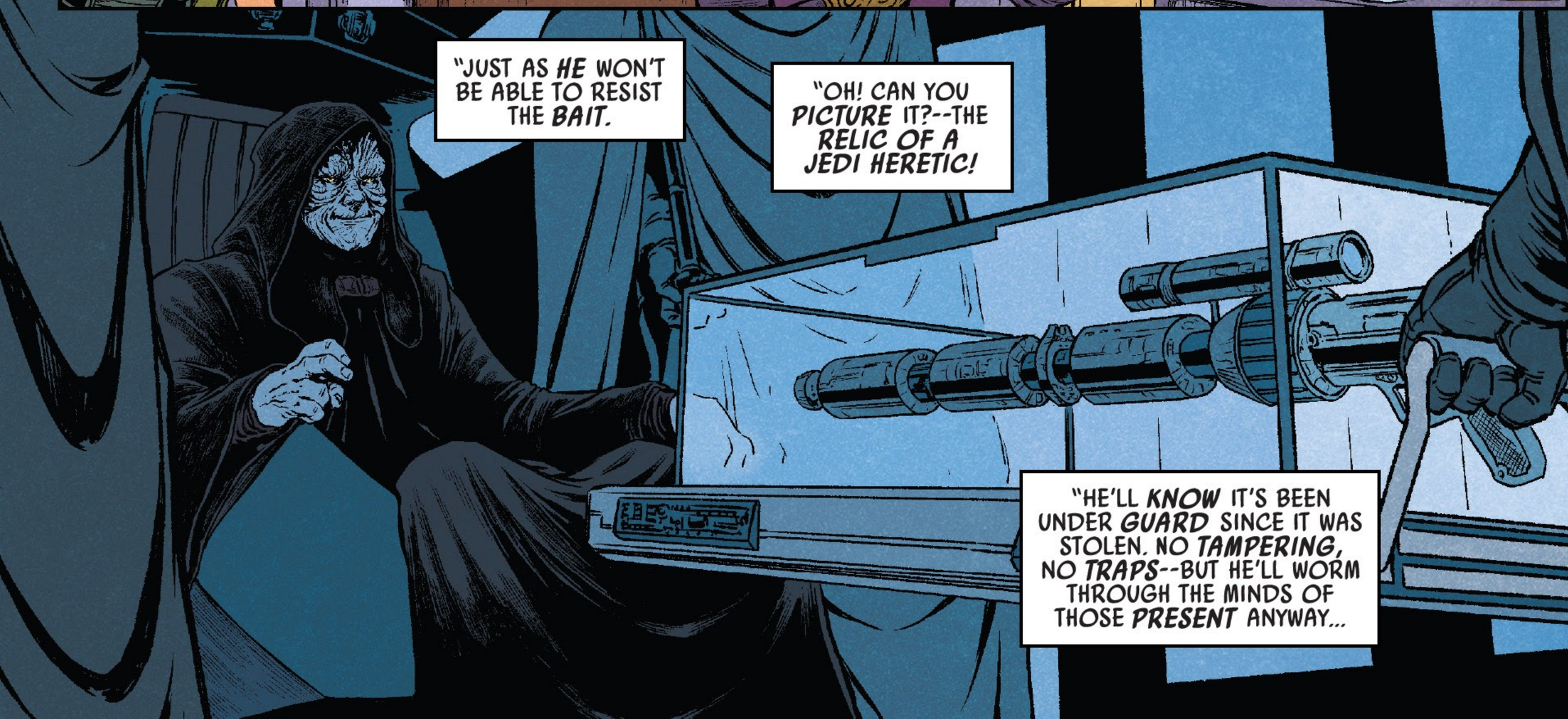

EVEN IF THEY DID HAVE THE RESOURCES TO BUILD A DEATH STAR--AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THEY DON'T--IT'S NOT THEIR WAY. THEY WANT TO WIN HEARTS AND MINDS, NOT EXTERMINATE INNOCENTS.
YOU TAKE IT FROM ME: SUPERWEAPONS ARE BAD P.R. THEY PRETENDED TO HAVE A CONSPIRACY IN THEIR OWN RANKS, JUST TO CONVINCE YOU.

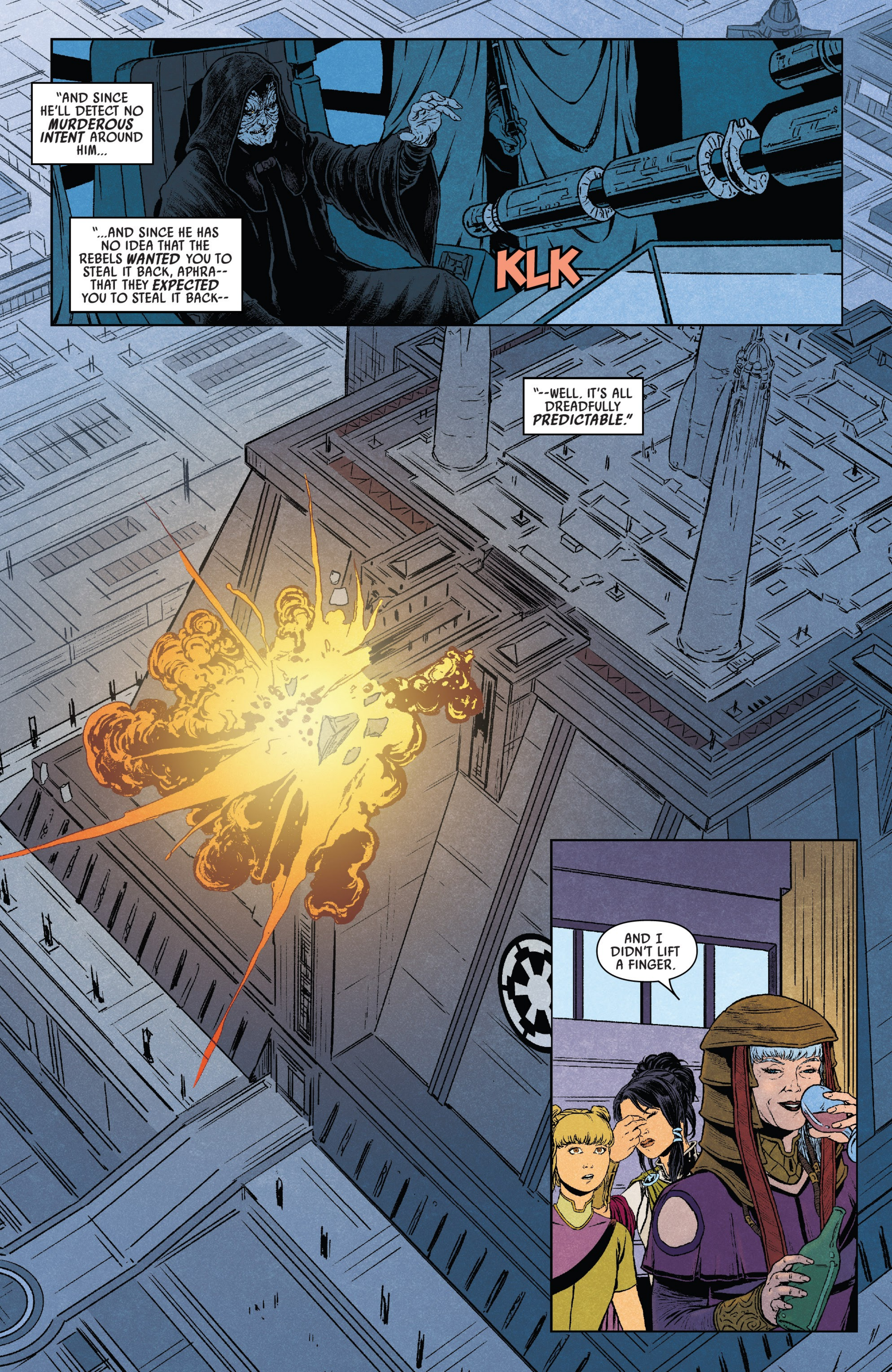
TELL ME--DID SHE CLAIM TO BE OUT OF THE LOOP? YOUR LOVER. THE TURNCOAT.
ONE LAST MOMENT OF CONNECTION BETWEEN YOU TO REALLY SELL THE LIE?

SHE HELPED THE REBELS USE YOU, APHRA.
NEVER SUSPECTING I WAS USING THEM.

I SUPPOSE THE SHUTTLE WILL BE NEARLY THERE BY NOW...
YOU SEE, I COULDN'T COMMISSION AN ASSASSINATION DEVICE MYSELF. WORD WOULD GET BACK TO HIS MAJESTY. BUT THE REBELS?

THEY HAVE THEIR SHARE OF EXPERTS. AND WHEN FACED WITH A DEVICE AS COMPLEX AS THAT RIFLE...?
...KNOWING THAT HE'D WANT TO SEE IT FOR HIMSELF...?
NO. NO, THEY WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RESIST HIDING SOMETHING DEADLY INSIDE IT.


"JUST AS HE WON'T BE ABLE TO RESIST THE BAIT.
"OH! CAN YOU PICTURE IT?--THE RELIC OF A JEDI HERETIC!
"HE'LL KNOW IT'S BEEN UNDER GUARD SINCE IT WAS STOLEN. NO TAMPERING, NO TRAPS--BUT HE'LL WORM THROUGH THE MINDS OF THOSE PRESENT ANYWAY...


"AND SINCE HE'LL DETECT NO MURDEROUS INTENT AROUND HIM...
"...AND SINCE HE HAS NO IDEA THAT THE REBELS WANTED YOU TO STEAL IT BACK, APHRA-- THAT THEY EXPECTED YOU TO STEAL IT BACK--
KLK
"--WELL, IT'S ALL DREADFULLY PREDICTABLE."
AND I DIDN'T LIFT A FINGER.

THAT IS THE MOST CONVOLUTED PLAN I'VE EVER HEARD.
AND YET SO FRIGHTFULLY INEVITABLE--NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOUR MISTRESS SULKS ABOUT IT.
COME NOW, APHRA--THERE ARE WORSE THINGS THAN BEING USED.
IT WON'T BE A BOMB.
HM?
TOO RISKY. MIGHT GET DETECTED. AND--LIKE YOU SAID: THE REBELS AREN'T THE MASS MURDER TYPE.
"SOME SORT OF ION PULSE AND STUN BOMB--THAT'S MY BET. TAKE OUT COMMS AND DEFENSES. KNOCK OUT EVERYONE IN THE ROOM.
"IF THEY'RE REALLY SMART THEY'LL USE AN UNSTABLE SYNTHCRYSTAL AS A TRIGGER. MAKE SURE IT ONLY BLOWS FOR A FORCE USER."
HPH. DOESN'T CHANGE A THING.
'COURSE NOT. DOESN'T MATTER IF HE'S COMATOSE OR A CORPSE. WITH PALPY DOWN, HEARTS AND MINDS ARE UP FOR GRABS--AND THE THRONE WITH 'EM.
SOMETHING MY MOM USED TO SAY:
"THERE ARE NO GOODIES AND BADDIES. THERE'S JUST WHOEVER'S TOUGH ENOUGH TO BE IN CHARGE OF THE STORY TODAY."
HMPH. THAT'S RATHER GOOD.
"...AND EVEN THEY'RE JUST WAITING TO BE PUSHED OVER BY THE NEXT FANATIC IN LINE."

OKAY, SO, LET'S SEE...THE PALACE IS ***DEFENSELESS***. THE EMPEROR'S OUT COLD. *ZOP!* REBEL FLEET DROPS OUT OF HYPER RIGHT ***OVERHEAD***.

MUSIC. CONFETTI. PLUCKY LIBERATORS SEIZE POWER WHILE THE EVIL BUREAUCRATS HAVE A PANIC ATTACK IN THE ROYAL BATHROOM.

EXCEPT... THAT'S NOT HOW THE STORY GOES--IS IT?

"BECAUSE YOUR ***EXTENSIVELY MANEUVERING ALLIES*** ARE RIGHT THERE ***WAITING*** FOR THEM--AND I BET YOU'VE BEEN PREPPING THE ***HEADLINES*** FOR MONTHS.

"REBEL ALLIANCE ASSASSINATES EMPEROR IN LATEST TERRORIST ATROCITY!

"MINISTER VOOR SPEAR-HEADS HEROIC DEFENSE OF CORUSCANT--NOW PRIME CANDIDATE FOR ROYAL SUCCESSION!"

...YOU KNOW, DEAR, ONE HAS THE IRRITATING IMPRESSION YOU'RE NOT ***SURPRISED*** BY ANY OF THIS.

BUSTED.

YOU ***KNEW*** THIS WAS MY PLAN? HOW?!

EH, TOO MUCH THAT DIDN'T ADD UP. LIKE--I NEVER BELIEVED THAT ***SUPERWEAPON*** CRAP. AND YOU ***HAD*** TO BE UP TO SOMETHING OR VADER WOULDA COME FOR ME BY NOW.

BUT--MOSTLY?

STAN'S SOAPBOX · MAY 1969

STAN'S SOAPBOX

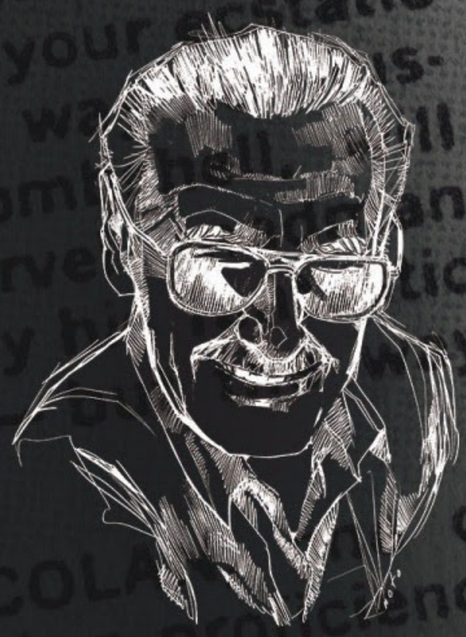
For many years we've been trying, in our own bumbling way, to illustrate that love is a far greater force, a far greater power than hate. Now we don't mean you're expected to go around like a pirouetting Pollyanna, tossing posies at everyone who passes by, but we do want to make a point. Let's consider three men: Buddha, Christ, and Moses . . . men of peace, whose thoughts and deeds have influenced countless millions throughout the ages — and whose presence still is felt in every corner of the earth. Buddha, Christ, and Moses . . . men of good will, men of tolerance, and especially men of love. Now, consider the practitioners of hate who have sullied the pages of history. Who still venerates their words? Where is homage still paid to their memory? What banners still are raised to their cause? The power of love — and the power of hate. Which is most truly enduring? When you tend to despair . . . let the answer sustain you.

Excelsior!

Smiley

GRAINGER, North Carolina . . . our pal SAL BUSCEMA, Virginia; while Jaunty J. STERANKO and Joltin' J. CRAIG both have their pads in Pennsylvania . . . Torrid TOM SUTTON, Massachusetts . . . JIM (Madman) MOONEY, Connecticut . . . and Valiant VINCE COLLETTA, Jumpin' JOHNNY SEVERIN, and Genial GENE COLAN, all nesting in New Jersey! The rest of us share the same high taxes and traffic jams in New York and Long Island — darn it! (And we never DID find out where Honest Irv holes up!)

Now, before cutting out, we've just gotta tell you about Jolly SOLLY BRODSKY. A few days ago he announced that he, stun-



STAN LEE
FOREVER

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"TOLVAN LET ME GO TOO *EASY*."

I BROKE HER HEART. SHE'S TOO SMART TO *EVER* HELP ME AGAIN.

UH, DOC? I'M *LOST*, WHAT'S--

PRETTY MUCH *EVERYONE* WAS USING ME, KID. AND I PRETTY MUCH *LET* 'EM.

WHY GO ALONG WITH IT?

IF IT WASN'T *US*, YOU'D JUST USE SOMEONE *ELSE*. THIS WAY WE GOT A *PARDON*.

BUT-- BUT HE'S THE *EMPEROR*...!

TELL YOU WHAT--HERE'S WHAT I *DON'T* UNDERSTAND.

YOU AND THE REBS, BOTH USING ME 'CAUSE I'M *SOOOOO* DAMN PREDICTABLE--

--HOW'D YOU KNOW I WOULDN'T JUST *RUN?* TAKE THE RELIC AND *DISAPPEAR?* I'VE DONE IT BEFORE.

KLK

BECAUSE OF *THIS*.

THE ONE TIME YOU DID SOMETHING I *DIDN'T* EXPECT.

AS LONG AS THE EMPIRE'S AFTER *YOU*, IT'S ALSO AFTER EVERYONE YOU *KNOW*. YOUR FAMILY. YOUR LOVER. YOUR WARD.

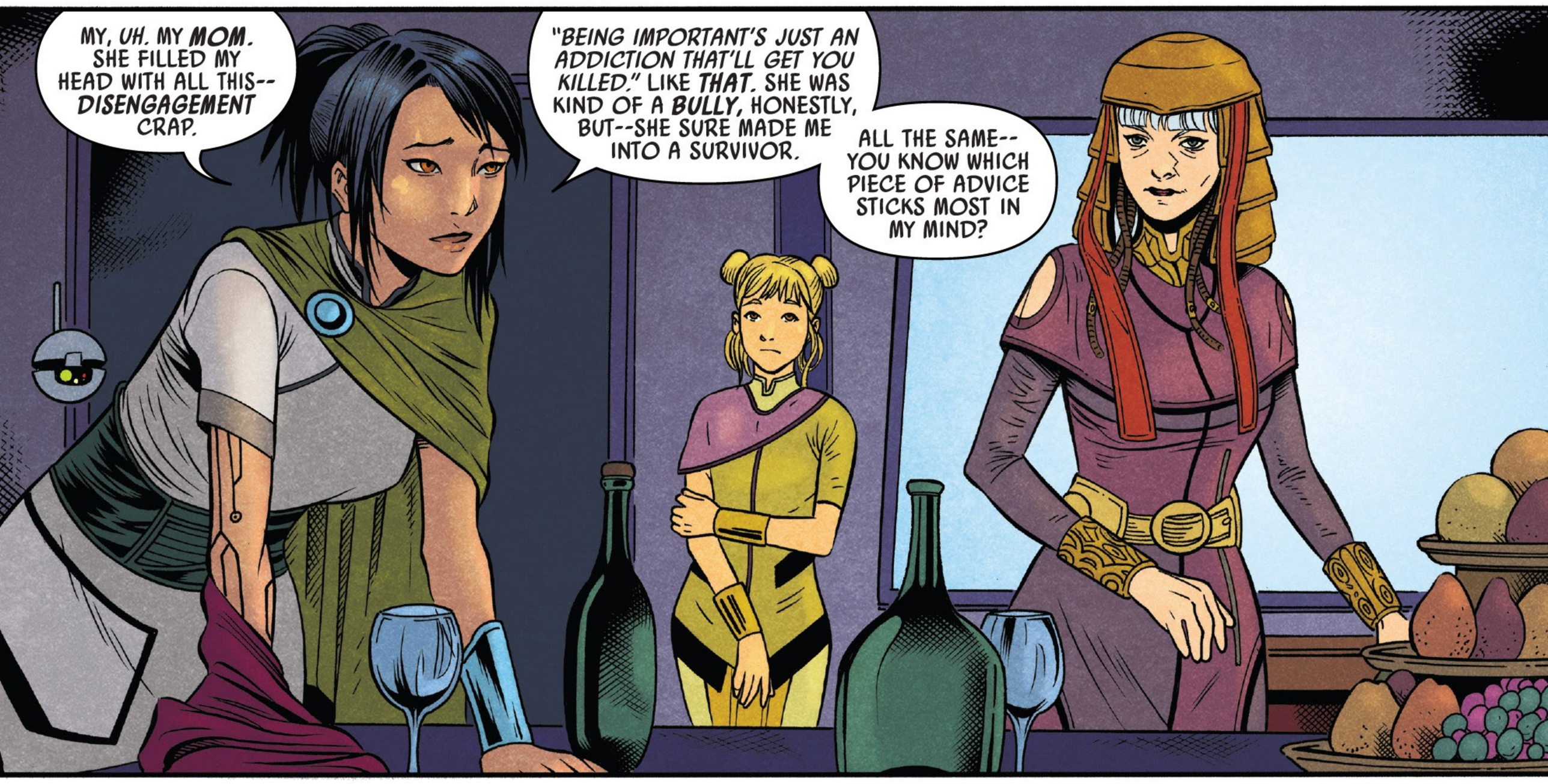
ACTUALLY, I'M NOT HER W--

SHUT UP, TINY WARD.

YOU SOLD OUT TO SAVE THE ONES YOU LOVE.

AWFUL YOU MAY BE, BUT YOU'RE GETTING SENTIMENTAL IN YOUR OLD AGE.

EVEN *THAT'S* PREDICTABLE IN ITS WAY.

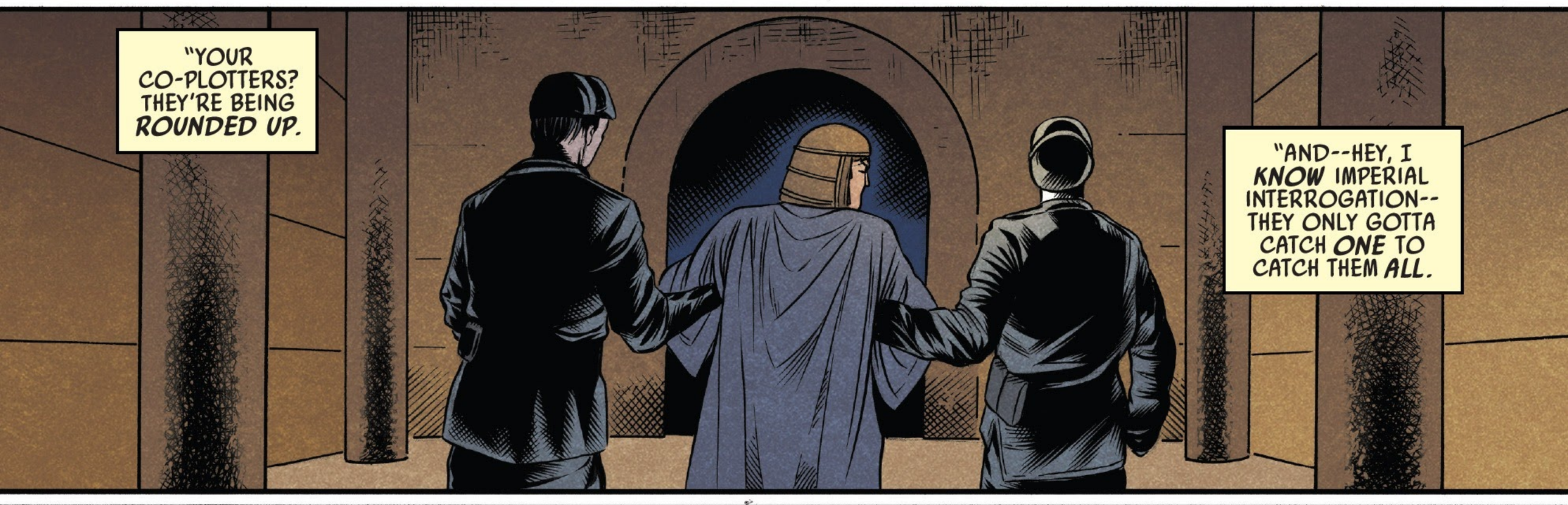

MY, UH. MY MOM. SHE FILLED MY HEAD WITH ALL THIS-- DISENGAGEMENT CRAP.
"BEING IMPORTANT'S JUST AN ADDICTION THAT'LL GET YOU KILLED." LIKE THAT. SHE WAS KIND OF A BULLY, HONESTLY, BUT--SHE SURE MADE ME INTO A SURVIVOR.
ALL THE SAME-- YOU KNOW WHICH PIECE OF ADVICE STICKS MOST IN MY MIND?

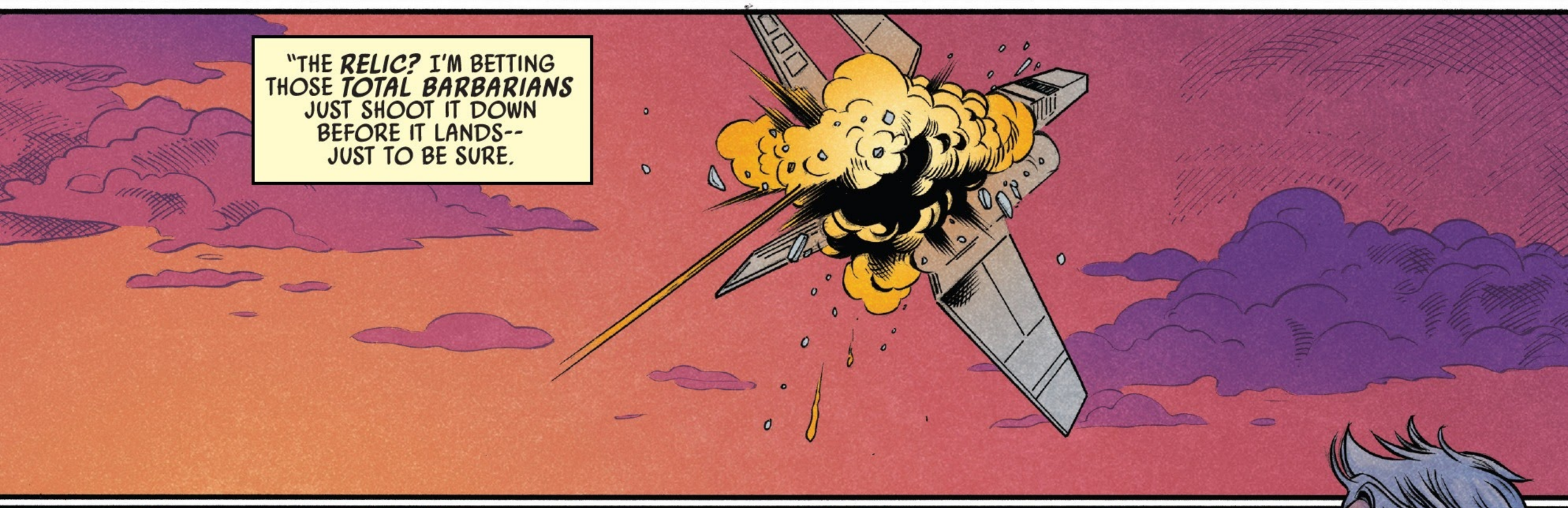
I THINK ALL ANYONE CAN HOPE FOR-- ULTIMATELY?
HMMM.
IS TO DO RIGHT BY THE PEOPLE THEY LOVE.

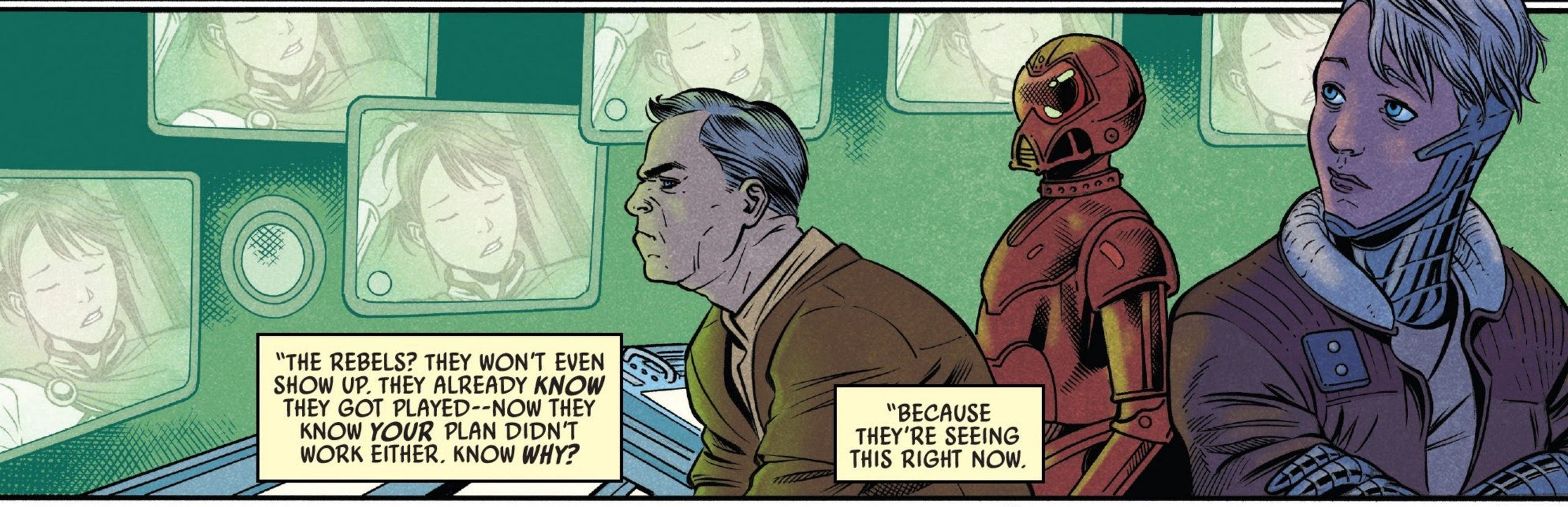
HOW REVOLTINGLY SAPPY.
I KNOW, RIGHT?

BUT THAT'S WHY YOUR PLAN'S FAILED.

... I BEG YOUR PARDON?
=SIGH= OKAY. MY TURN WITH THE PREDICTIONS:







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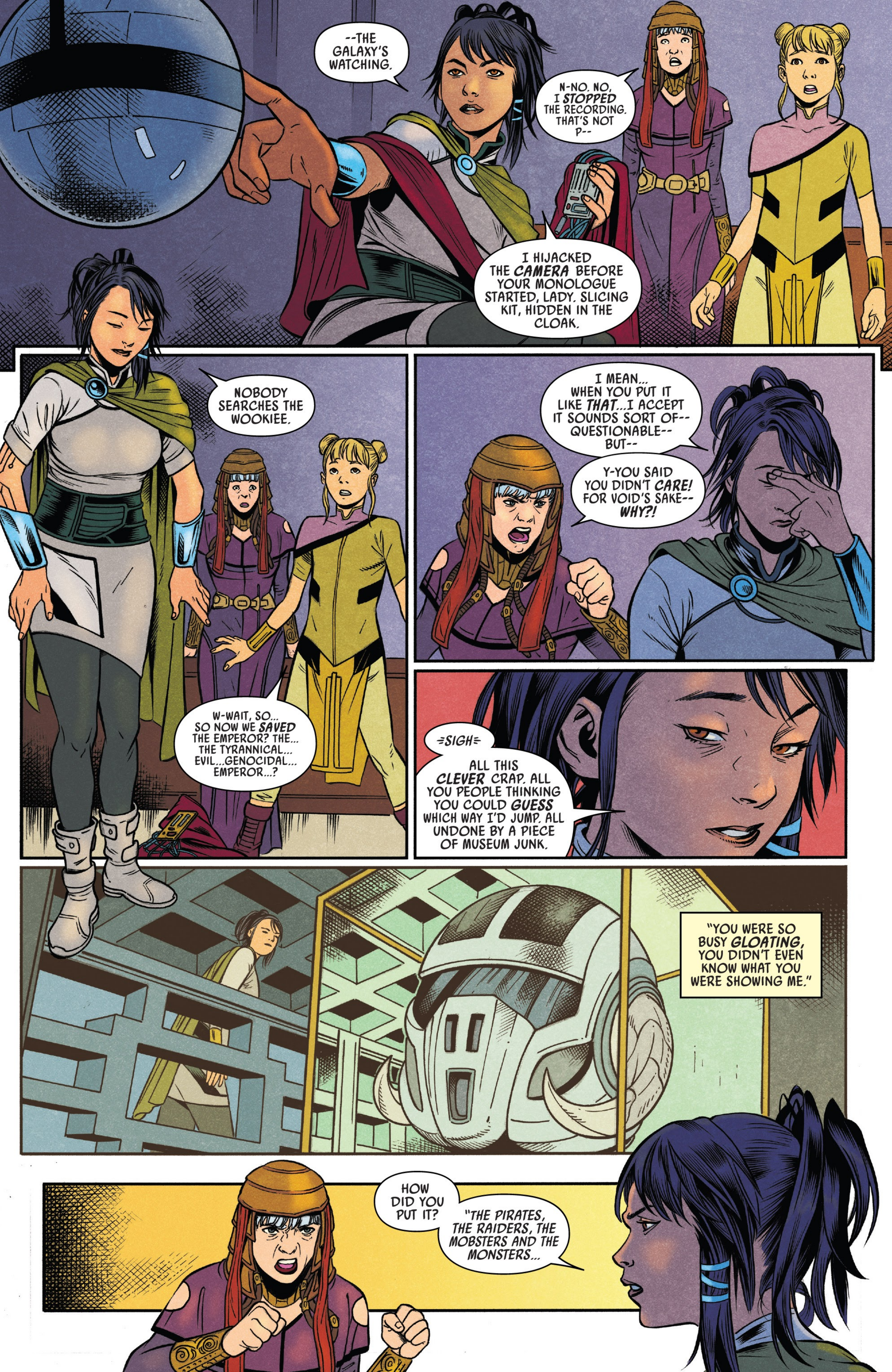
--THE GALAXY'S WATCHING.
N-NO. NO, I STOPPED THE RECORDING. THAT'S NOT P--
I HIJACKED THE CAMERA BEFORE YOUR MONOLOGUE STARTED, LADY. SLICING KIT, HIDDEN IN THE CLOAK.
NOBODY SEARCHES THE WOOKIEE.
W-WAIT, SO... SO NOW WE SAVED THE EMPEROR? THE... THE TYRANNICAL... EVIL...GENOCIDAL... EMPEROR...?
I MEAN... WHEN YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT...I ACCEPT IT SOUNDS SORT OF-- QUESTIONABLE-- BUT--
Y-YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T CARE! FOR VOID'S SAKE-- WHY?!
=SIGH= ALL THIS CLEVER CRAP. ALL YOU PEOPLE THINKING YOU COULD GUESS WHICH WAY I'D JUMP. ALL UNDONE BY A PIECE OF MUSEUM JUNK.
"YOU WERE SO BUSY GLOATING, YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU WERE SHOWING ME."
HOW DID YOU PUT IT?
"THE PIRATES, THE RAIDERS, THE MOBSTERS AND THE MONSTERS...

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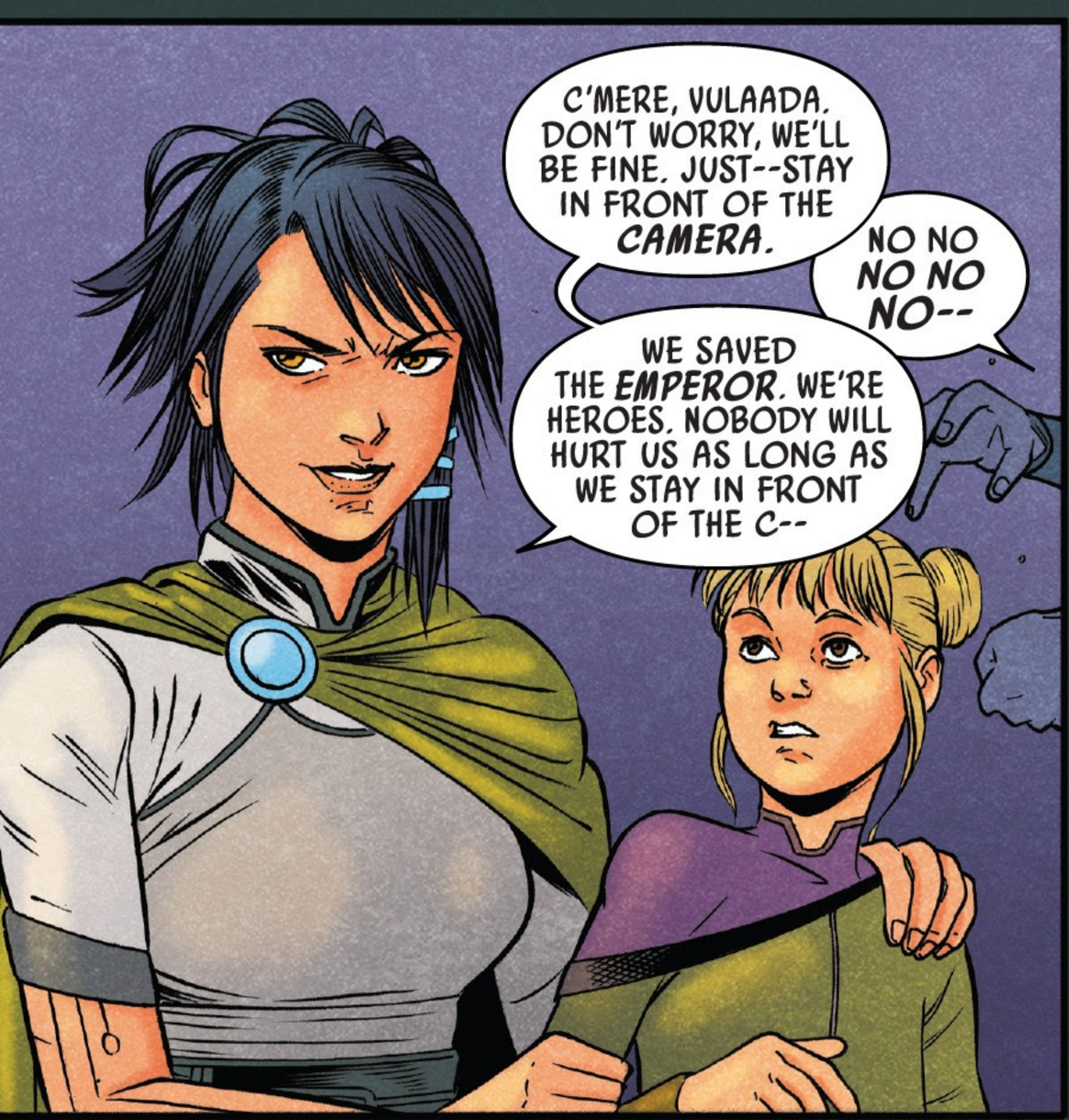
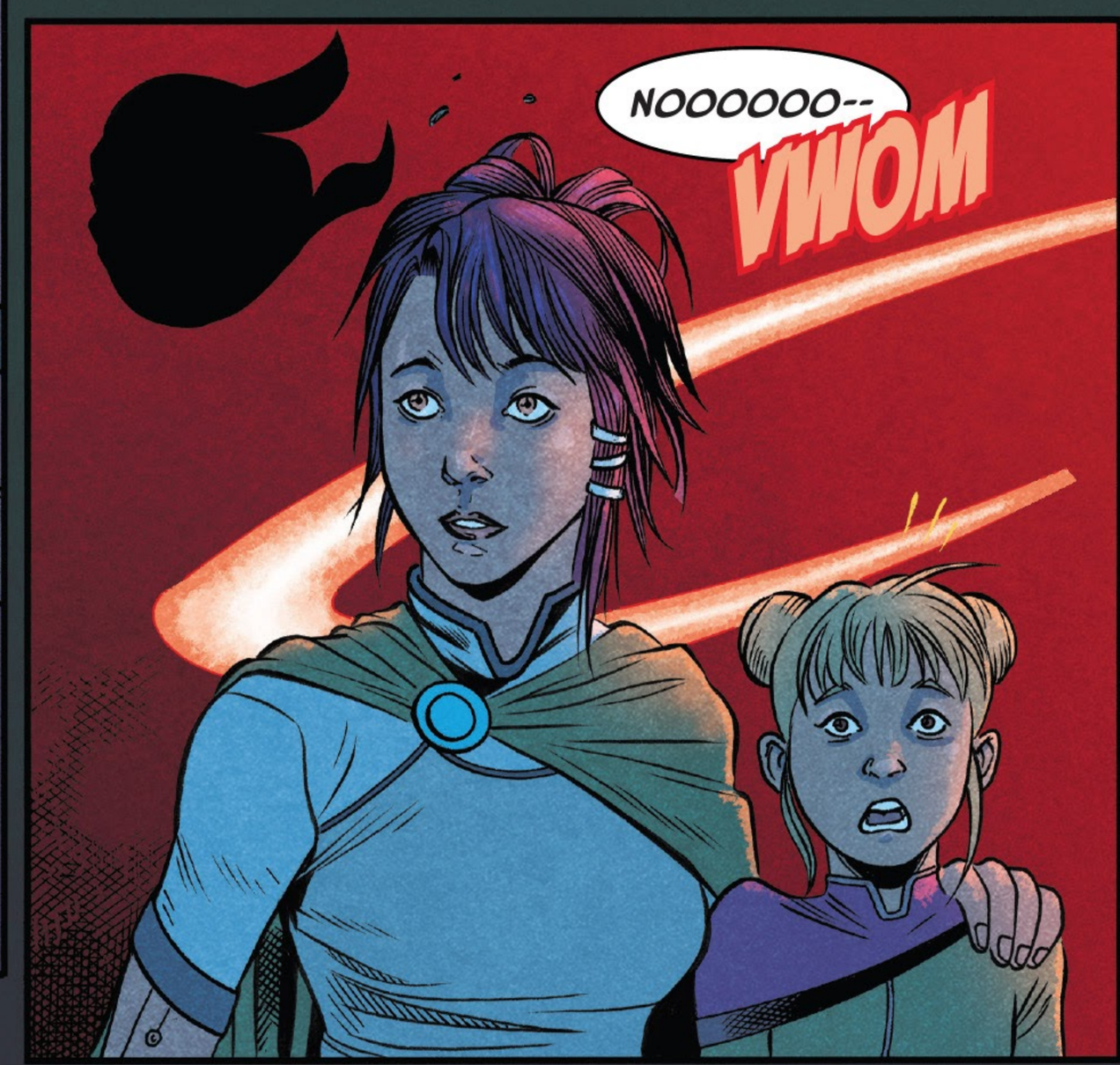
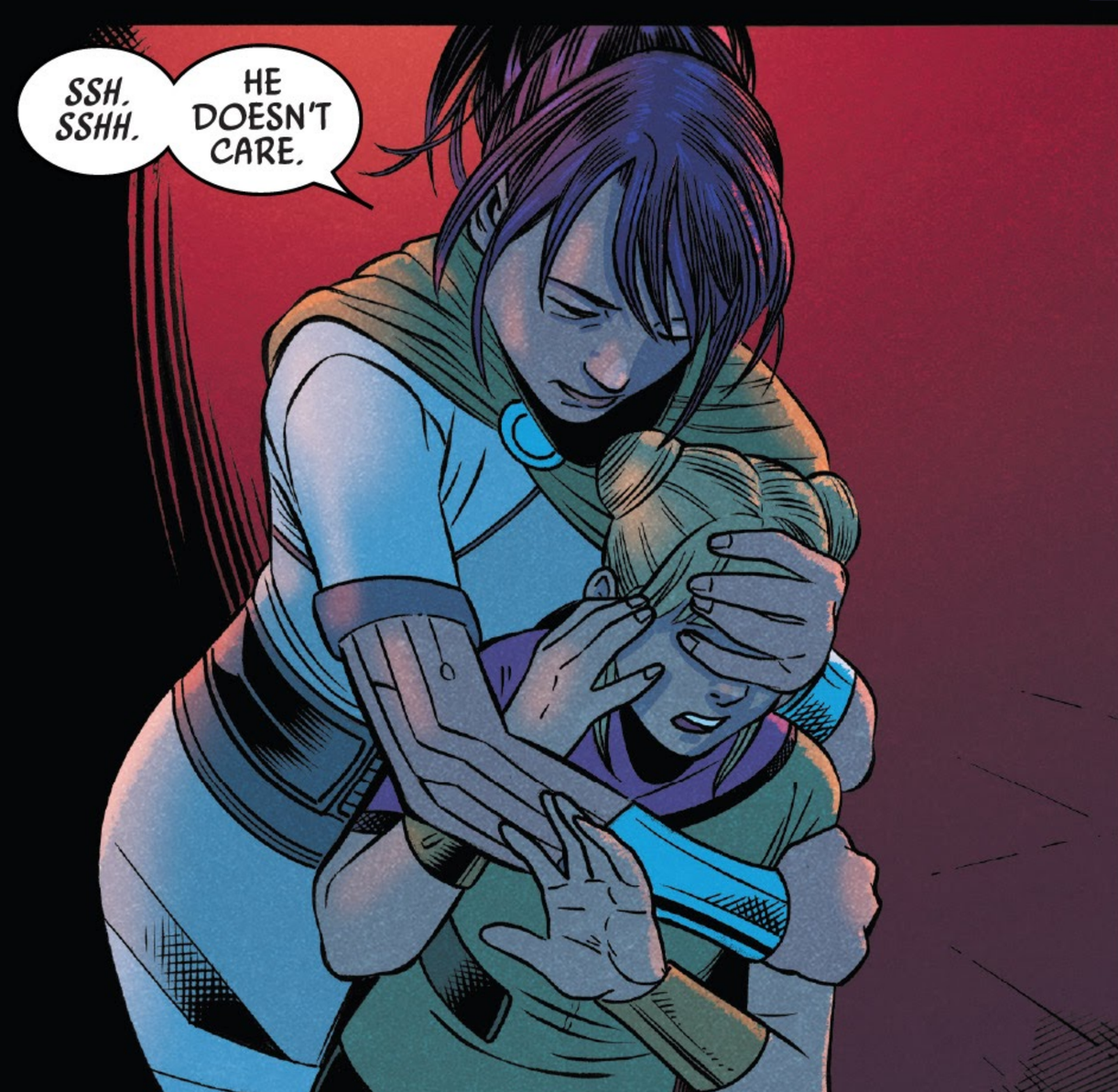

C'MERE, VULAADA. DON'T WORRY, WE'LL BE FINE. JUST--STAY IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA.
NO NO NO NO NO--
WE SAVED THE EMPEROR. WE'RE HEROES. NOBODY WILL HURT US AS LONG AS WE STAY IN FRONT OF THE C--


NOOOOOO--
VWOM

APHRA.
APHRA, THAT'S--
SH.

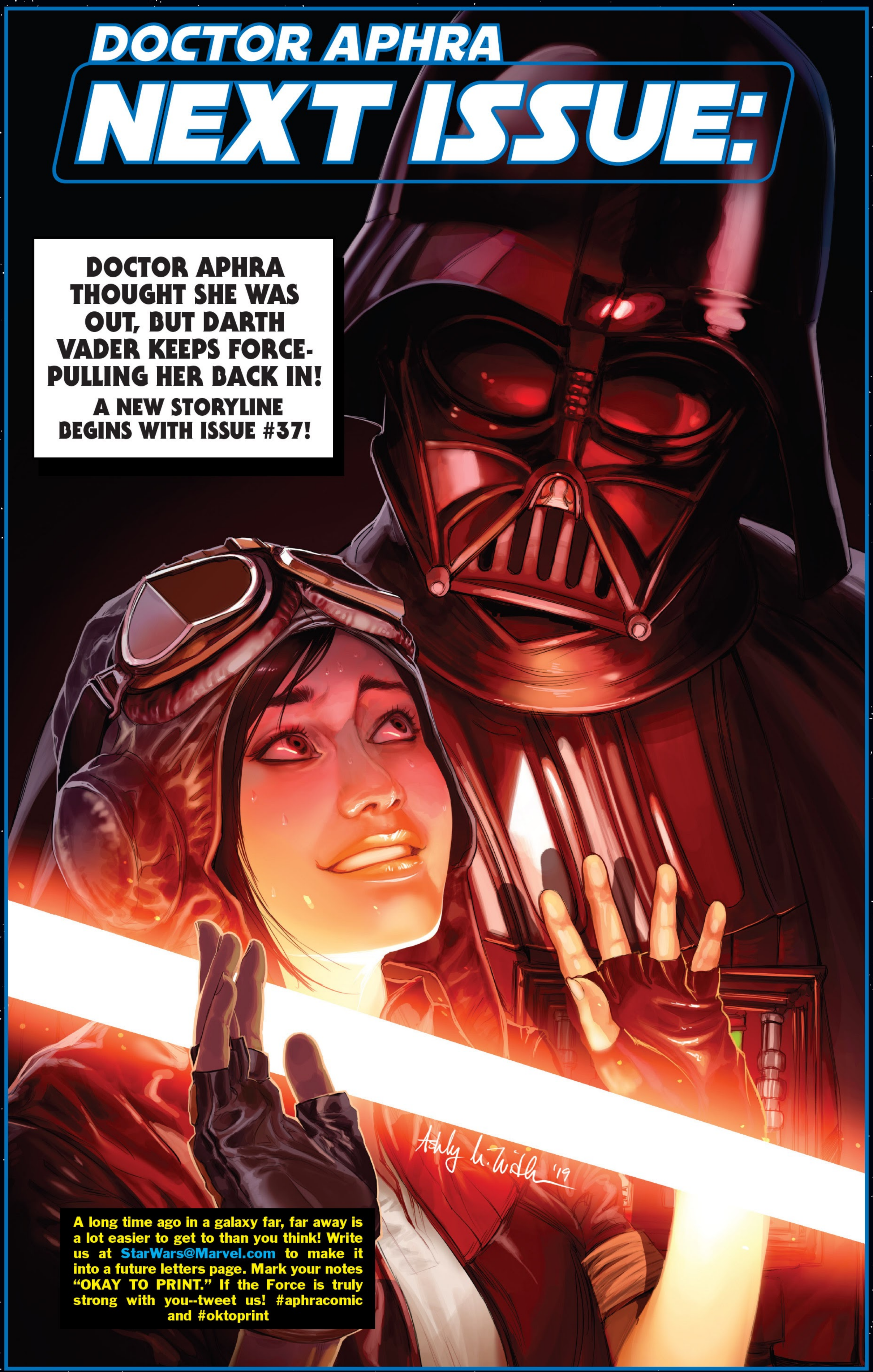
SHUT YOUR EYES. SSSHH.
DON'T LOOK.
B-BUT-- BUT WE'RE HEROES...


SSH. SSHH.
HE DOESN'T CARE.

DOCTOR APHRA.
ARISE.

YOUR EMPIRE HAS *NEED* OF YOU.
To Be Continued...

DOCTOR APHRA NEXT ISSUE:



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